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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BOGOTA 007359

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SUBJECT: U/S BURNS MEETING WITH COLOMBIAN MOD OSPINA

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood; reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d)

1. (U) July 27, 2005, 10:00-11:00 am, Ministry of Defense,  
Bogota

2. (U) Participants:

U.S.  
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Nicholas Burns, U/S for Political Affairs  
Ambassador William B. Wood  
Jeffrey DeLaurentis, Political Counselor  
Cynthia Echeverria, P Special Assistant  
Peter Husta, Acting MilGroup Commander  
1. Scott Gage, Deputy Defense Attache  
Dana Brown, notetaker  
Luis Guio, Interpreter

Colombia  
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Camilo Ospina Bernal, Minister of Defense  
Jorge Eastman, Vice Minister of Defense  
Vicente Echandia, International Defense Office

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Summary  
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3. (C) Defense Minister Camilo Ospina briefed U/S Burns on his priorities during his tenure: fighting terrorism, locating hostages and guerrilla leaders, reforming military justice, strengthening U.S.-Colombian defense relations, and proceeding with paramilitary demobilization. Under Secretary Burns emphasized our support for those initiatives but warned that the GOC needed to continue improving human rights efforts to secure future U.S. assistance. Ospina agreed to work further with the Afghani government on their counternarcotics strategy. He agreed to confirm the GOC's interest in moving ahead with bilateral military agreement talks and promised to respond by July 28. Burns recommended that the GOC consider future areas of cooperation in advance of President Uribe's visit to Crawford. End summary.

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Counterterrorism Priorities  
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4. (C) Minister Camilo Ospina stressed his interest in defeating the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and noted progress made during the Uribe Administration. Vice Minister Eastman added that by "defeating," Ospina meant forcing the FARC to the negotiating table under the GOC's terms rather than actually eliminating each member. Nevertheless, Ospina said one of his highest priorities as minister was to locate and capture FARC leaders. He hoped high-level captures would help drive the FARC to the table. Another key mission, he noted, was locating the hostages and returning them safely. Ospina said he was intent on including American citizens in any hostage release program and/or freeing them separately.

5. (C) Ospina discussed the problem of guerrillas using Venezuela and Ecuador as refuges and supply sources. He said the guerrillas had been displaced into the jungles and across the borders by the Colombian military offensive, Plan Patriota. Displacement into Venezuela was a threat because the majority of Venezuela's military reservists used ammunition compatible with the FARC's weapons. Ecuador had a more cooperative relationship with Colombia, but that their dollarized economy lent itself to money laundering. Venezuela was the more volatile of the two neighbors, and more likely to generate a border crisis as a way of diverting attention away from internal problems. At the same time, he recognized Venezuela's recent cooperation and extradition of FARC leader Chiguiro.

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Military Justice Remains a Vulnerability  
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6. (U) U/S Burns asked Ospina about the status of military justice reforms and human rights cases against the military.

Ospina briefed on the status of the Cajamarca, Arauca, San Jose de Apartado, and Mapiripan cases involving the military and stressed that all four were pending resolution in the civilian justice system. He added that the number of civilian complaints against the military had fallen almost 50 percent since 2004 and credited human rights training for the improvement. Burns advised Ospina that military justice flaws could be a serious impediment to continuing U.S. assistance to the Colombian public forces. He urged that the military respond to charges in high-profile cases involving the military even as it waits for the final verdict. The United States would not be providing assistance to the 17th Army Brigade because of human rights issues, and a failure to improve military justice in the near future could create other difficulties. Ospina responded that he hoped to have the military justice reform package approved by the end of the year and believed the accusatorial system would help the military evaluate future cases much more efficiently.

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Colombia Seeks to Strengthen Defense Relations  
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17. (S) U/S Burns raised the issue of an enhanced defense relationship. Ospina requested the United States consider negotiating some formal military bilateral agreement in the near future. A Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA) or other enhanced defense relationship would not only improve our defense cooperation but also enhance regional stability. Neighboring nations might be concerned initially with such an agreement, but an agreement would be helpful in the long-term. Burns responded that the United States had put plans to discuss these options on hold per Colombia's request, but would be happy to advance them if the Colombians were ready. Ospina promised to consult President Uribe and confirm the GOC's interest before Crawford.

18. (S) Ospina requested additional intelligence assistance and technical capabilities to allow observation of guerrillas under triple canopy jungle cover. He said such information, and any intelligence on the whereabouts of high value targets, would be used to locate and defeat guerrilla forces.

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Colombian Role Abroad  
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19. (C) Burns thanked Ospina for Colombia's efforts to share aerial eradication techniques with Afghanistan. He congratulated Ospina on Colombia's aerial eradication missions that have already eradicated more than 100,000 hectares this year, which is ahead of last year. He contrasted Colombia's efforts with efforts in Afghanistan, which only eradicated 200 hectares. He noted the Afghan government's refusal to consider aerial eradication missions. Burns encouraged Colombia to continue its role as mentor to Afghanistan. Ospina said Colombia would be willing to send a counternarcotics team there to assess the situation and offer advice. Burns inquired informally whether Colombia would be willing to send troops to Iraq, and Ospina said he would look in to the possibility.

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Demobilization and Peace  
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10. (C) Ospina reported that the Colombian government had demobilized over 13,000 illegal fighters during the Uribe Administration, and hoped to demobilize another 8,000 this year. The GOC had three tasks involved in the demobilization process: (1) reduce the presence of illegal armed groups active, (2) protect civilians' rights while dismantling drug structures, and (3) prosecute terrorist leaders under the appropriate demobilization law. Burns recognized that balancing peace with justice was difficult, but warned Ospina that the GOC had to rigorously and energetically implement the law so that the guilty were punished in Colombia or extradited as appropriate. He stressed that all those who violate U.S. laws should be tried in the United States and underscored the importance of maintaining our extradition relationship under the new Justice and Peace law.

11. (U) This message has been cleared by Under Secretary Burns.  
DRUCKER